

Post-Event Summary Report

Name of Event: Transportation Solutions for an Aging Society

Date of Event: April 14, 2005

Location of Event: Cambridge, Massachusetts

Number of Persons Attending: 189

Sponsoring Organizations: AARP, MIT AgeLab, U.S. Department of Transportation

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In order to recognize the basic right of America's seniors to sufficient and appropriate transportation, the MIT AgeLab, the U.S. Department of Transportation and AARP joined together on April 14, 2005, to host a public event to develop transportation-related policy recommendations to the White House Conference on Aging. Nearly 190 people from 19 states and the insurance, health, transportation, and automobile industries attended the event held at the MIT Faculty Club.

The presenters noted that the nation is facing a growing safety and mobility problem as the size of the population over age 65 skyrockets. By 2030 it is expected that 71 million Americans, or 20% of the total U.S. population, will be over age 65. By that time the number of Americans 85 and older will double to nearly 9 million. If the current highway fatality rate for those over age 65 remains at today's level, the increase in the senior population will lead to a doubling or tripling of the number of elders killed on the highways by 2030. Continued safety improvements for older drivers, pedestrians and transit users are essential as is the critical need to provide transportation options for the millions of seniors who stop driving and for those who have always relied on public transportation.

Like their younger counterparts, most older Americans depend on the automobile to give them independence, get them to where they need to go for essential services, and to maintain their quality of life. Transportation is what keeps all of us, seniors included, connected to our communities and able to lead productive and fulfilling lives. It is essential that the nation address the situation now as the development period for transportation infrastructure can be long and the need is growing daily.

Advance preparations for alternative transportation cannot come soon enough, said one speaker at the April 14 event. "This generation is truly wedded to its car, from cradle to grave, more so than any other generation." Each year, approximately one million Americans must stop driving. Seventy percent of people over the age of 50 in the United

States live in rural or suburban areas, where there is simply not enough public transportation.

While noting that resources are limited, the Conference attendees agreed on five key policy recommendations for increasing quality of life and mobility for aging Americans. Recommendations for the White House Conference on Aging are as follows:

Priority Issue #1: Increase Federal investments in public transportation in order to improve mobility for older adults and for all Americans. As a policy goal, funding should be sufficient to allow for improved and expanded public transportation services so that Americans have the freedom to travel where and when they want.

Priority Issue #2: Promote the expansion of volunteer driver programs that provide transportation to seniors. The nation needs policies that stimulate and support national volunteer driver recruitment efforts by encouraging retirees, college students, service employees and others to become volunteer drivers.

Priority Issue #3: Request the U.S. Department of Transportation, Office of the Secretary, to conduct a study on the future travel needs of aging boomers with priority placed on travel for non-medical purposes (e.g. food, shopping, leisure) as well as recognition of demographic factors such as gender, new residential patterns and transportation mode of choice. A complete investigation of actual travel needs will prove invaluable to finding the most appropriate transportation solutions.

Priority Issue #4: Enact legislation directing Medicare to fund non-emergency medical transportation. Currently Medicare reimburses for emergency medical transportation only. Seniors shouldn't be forced to take an expensive ambulance ride when that is not needed, and Medicare ends up wasting millions by providing "emergency" rides for medical conditions where transportation could be provided at a less costly lower level of care.

Priority Issue #5: Enact and implement Federal legislation to increase funds for highway safety improvements proven to help older road users. Upgrading roadways, signage and lighting for older drivers will greatly improve safety and mobility for all drivers.